

EAT BEAT

by Martha Wagner

December is the month of indulgence—the time for fruitcake, eggnog, cookies, homemade gifts from the kitchen. Then comes January, the month of new diets or at least the resolve to eat better.

One of the most enjoyable ways to eat better is to expand your repertoire of fresh vegetables. Such is the theme of many new cookbooks and advice from food writers like Marion Burros, Pierre Franey and Craig Claiborne.

Winter may seem like a bleak time for vegetables. It's actually the perfect time to try out some of the vegetables you routinely pass by at the store. We are a nation of vegetable know-nots. Many vegetables grown domestically are either treated as "undesirable aliens" (turnips, rutabagas, parsnips) or hardly known at all (kohlrabi, salsify, Jerusalem artichokes), says *New York Times* food writer Burros.

Kale is in the latter category. When I've bought it recently, other shoppers have asked me just what it is that I'm struggling to fit into a plastic bag. Then, follows the question, what do I actually do with this large bunch of curly green leaves. I tell them it's good, chopped in soups. If they seem really interested, I recommend my favorite vegetable cookbook, *The Victory Garden Cookbook* by Marian Morash. It has a chapter of kale recipes, from soup to calzone.

What's so great about kale? Compared to the best known cooking green, spinach, it keeps longer without wilting, and it's much more nutritious. Kale is one of the top vegetable sources of calcium, a nutrient most American women need more of. It's also high in iron and vitamin A. Calorie-wise, it's a modest 40 calories per cooked cup.

Kale's flavor is mild to slightly sharp. The vegetable makes an attractive bright green addition to a pot of soup, I like it best in bean soups. It also makes a good addition to stews, stir-fry dishes, egg dishes (omelets, frittatas, etc.) and lasagna. The stems are thick but can be sliced in small pieces and cooked with the chopped leaves. Kale cooks in four to five minutes and retains its crinkly texture when cooked. For soups, add uncooked kale to the pot five minutes before serving.

Kale thrives in cold climates. It has a long culinary history in the British Isles. Colcannon is a traditional Irish dish combining kale and potatoes (what else?) with leeks, the mild-tasting long onions which have yet to be discovered by many Americans. Serve it as a side dish or try it as a filling for warmed pocket bread halves, reminiscent of a potato knish.

Colcannon

- 1 pound kale
- 1 1/2 pounds potatoes
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup chopped leeks
- 1/2 cup milk or reserved potato broth
- salt and fresh pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

Wash and trim kale. If leaves are young, stems may be used. Blanch in boiling salted water until leaves are bright green and barely tender, about 3 minutes. Remove leaves with tongs and set aside to drain. Place peeled, quartered potatoes into the boiling water used for kale. Cook potatoes until tender, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, heat butter in a skillet and gently saute chopped leeks until tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Gently squeeze water from blanched kale and chop finely. When leeks are tender, add chopped kale and continue cooking 5 minutes more. When potatoes are tender, drain and mash them with milk or some of the potato cooking broth. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in kale and leek mixture. Reheat if necessary. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and serve. Serves 4 to 6. Fills 8 pocket bread halves.

Local natural food stores have beautiful kale right now. Much of it comes from Organically Grown, Inc., a marketing cooperative of ten local farmers and one in Southern Oregon. OGI began as an information sharing and bulk buying coop in 1976. It began wholesaling produce in 1981.

Today OGI is establishing a market for organically grown Oregon produce all over the country. It sells to stores from Seattle to Los Angeles and to distributors who ship to the East Coast. OGI also distributes organic and non-organic produce grown elsewhere—items like California Kiwis and navel oranges, two of the best buys right now, according to General Manager Joe Gabriel. If you've admired the quality of fruits and vegetables served at Cafe Zenon, the Excelsior, Charcuterie and Zoo Zoo's Restaurant, chances are the produce has come from OGI.

According to Gabriel, the coop's sales volume doubled in the past fiscal year. As farms give way to agribusiness throughout the country, it's nice to hear that organic farming is growing more profitable for Lane County farmers. Anyone needing more information on OGI can contact Gabriel at 342-6296.

For me, a good big city weekend includes some serious food browsing as well as the usual restaurant sampling. One of my favorite places in Portland for browsing—and nibbling—is Nature's natural foods grocery, at NE 24th and Fremont.

At the deli section there is hot soup, a special of the day and regular items like Szechuan noodle salad, mushroom cheese pate, smoked whitetish pate, French potato salad and tempeh salad. At the bakery counter there are breads from a number of Portland bakeries, plus muffins and scones baked daily at the store. There's a fresh fish case, a Japanese section, a very attractive produce section, and a wine department as well as the more usual natural food products. All this within a not-too-large, decidedly unfancy store. It's warm and inviting, like groceries of bygone times, and the staff is very helpful.

This Nature's store (there's another on SW Corbett) was remodeled and enlarged in the past year. Upstairs are tables for deli customers, plus a new kitchen used for weekly cooking classes. Upcoming classes include topics such as Sourdough—From Crepes to Cornbread, Vegetarian Entrees, Winter Macrobiotic Cooking, Kids Cook Lunch, and Phyllo Pastry. Classes are participation-style and include sharing the prepared meal. Most classes are 7 to 9:30 pm on weeknights. Average cost is \$10. For a class schedule, write to Nature's cooking school, 3439 N.E. 24th St., Portland, OR 97212.

Teatime—that relaxed late afternoon respite—is making a comeback in Portland. One of the most elegant settings for afternoon tea is the two-story gumwood paneled lounge of the Heathman Hotel, downtown at SW Broadway and Salmon. This is a proper English-style tea, served on fine china, with starched linen napkins. What makes it especially interesting is the changing menu of goodies served with the tea. Guests are served a sampler plate of sweets and tea sandwiches which reflect a different theme each month.

The Heathman tea is served from 2 to 5 pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Cost is \$5.75 per person and reservations are recommended. The current theme, a Scottish Hogmanay Tea, will change to an American Folk Tea scheduled for January 22 through February. The American theme coincides with the American Folk Art exhibit at the nearby Portland Art Museum. A docent from the museum will walk to the museum with guests at the conclusion of weekday afternoon teas and guide them through the exhibit. For information and reservations, call 1-241-4100.

Ever yearn for a root beer float, an ice cream soda, a cherry phosphate just like you remember from years past? The Chocolate Malt, a fifties style soda shop at 160 E. Broadway (across from the Quackenbush Building) has all the soda fountain favorites, plus a variety of burgers and special sandwiches (The Bogart, James Dean, etc.), fish and chips, omelets and more. The decor is in keeping with the fifties theme. There's even a juke box for playing your favorite tunes. Hours are 10:30 am to 9:30 pm Monday through Saturday.

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